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Honoring the Loyalists

There were more than 600 of them, a spirited sea of tuxedos and dinner jackets and splendid organza gowns. Their weathered faces suggested that some fellowship of older folk, maybe retirees, had assembled in Washington's Hilton Hotel last week. They were, instead, veterans of what President Ronald Reagan called "a twilight war." What bonded them and brought them together was the storied Office of Strategic Services, the cloak-and-dagger agency that was born in World War II and led to the formation, in 1947, of the CIA.

The President, dwarfed by a giant sepia photograph of OSS Founder William ("Wild Bill") Donovan behind the rostrum, paid generous tribute to these erstwhile practitioners of the dark arts of spying, espionage, sabotage and behind-the-lines derring-do. The OSS's achievements, said Reagan, were of the sort for which "praise and thanks can only come from history and not your contemporaries." But he tried to make up for the slight, saying, "We honor you, we salute you, we thank you for a job well done."

Amid the furor over Ronald Pelton's betrayal, the OSS veterans gathered for a festive 25th annual banquet that provided a mite of moral support to Administration efforts to bolster the nation's intelligence apparatus. The banqueters warmly applauded when Reagan pledged to do just that, and nobody there had any trouble seconding the President's praise of CIA Director William Casey as "one of the heroes of America's fight for freedom." After all, Bill Casey was one of them; from the OSS office in London, he had helped direct the deployment of agents behind enemy lines. Still, the real reason for the gathering could scarcely be overlooked. It was, most naturally, the tender remembrance of old adventures, old times, old friends.

Romance? Aline Griffith, 63, recruited into the OSS while in college and sent to Spain as a code clerk, wound up marrying a Spanish grandee to become the Countess of Romanones. Festooned with diamonds and emeralds, she smiled knowingly as she reminisced: "I hate to say it, but war is fun." High times? Eugene Sherman was 19

and en route to a guerrilla base 100 miles from Canton when Yale-trained Psychologist William Morgan, an OSS major, intercepted him. Sherman remembers that the two repaired to a restaurant and drank much too much at a party that ended when Morgan drew his pistol and shot out the lights. Rough times? Guy Martin, 75, who served in Ceylon, Burma and China, shook his head as he inspected a display of modern equipment like infrared binoculars. Said Martin: "We had parachutes and rifles, and that was about it." Adventure? James J. Angleton got into World War II as a private, entered

the OSS and soon rose to be the OSS's chief of counterintelligence, while simultaneously commanding a regiment in Italy; he later held the top counterintelligence slot in the CIA.

Long after the dinner, the talks, the toasts and the showing of a remarkably evocative old OSS propaganda film, the old-timers lingered on. Some hobbled about, silently inspecting familiar faces; some gathered about Angleton or Casey, eager for touches of familiarity and recognition. Gray-haired women in long gowns and heavy jewelry flirted roguishly with comrades from long ago.

An abundance of lore about the OSS has long since surfaced: how Lawyer Bill Donovan, a heroic World War I officer, jury-rigged the intelligence agency President Franklin Roosevelt wanted by recruiting an elite of socialites (Polo Player Raymond Guest), millionaires (Paul Mellon), intellectuals (Archibald Macleish), journalists (Stewart Alsop) and performers (Sterling Hayden). How the OSS got to be twitted as "Oh-So-Social." How it nurtured such future CIA leaders as Richard Helms, Angleton and Casey.

In the 40 years since the war, innumerable stories of operations and individual heroism (as well as some blunders) have found a way into print. Yet many old-timers reunited last week agreed with the sentiment of James Murphy, 81, OSS chief of counterintelligence. Said he: "The true facts of our accomplishments were never fully disclosed and explained." Georgetown University Professor Ray Cline, who went on from the OSS to become a CIA deputy director, said much the same, adding, "We want to get it all down before we all die out." —By Frank Trippett.

Reported by Alessandra Stanley/Washington



James Angleton



"Wild Bill" Donovan oversees Reagan salute